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RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 2328
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RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8926
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RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000060

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/15/2032

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SUBJECT: SENATOR COBURN MEETS WITH TAIWAN VP AND DEFENSE
MINISTER

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director Robert S. Wang, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), accompanied by the Deputy Director, met with Taiwan VP Annette Lu on January 11. Accompanied by Technical Section Chief Tony Hu, Senator Coburn separately met with Taiwan Defense Minister Lee Tien-yu the same morning. Both the Vice President and Defense Minister thanked the Senator for his strong support of Taiwan and raised concern over Beijing's newly planned flight route in the Taiwan Strait. The Vice President also discussed UN Resolution 2758 and the "UN for Taiwan" referendum, while the Defense Minister discussed both the increasing military threat posed by China and Taiwan's future defense cooperation with the U.S. The Vice President said she looks forward to visiting the U.S. after her term expires in March, and the Defense Minister invited the Senator to visit military units the next time he comes to Taiwan. End summary.

COBURN MEETING WITH VICE PRESIDENT

¶2. (C) VP Lu told Senator Coburn that she is concerned about the U.S. opposition to the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) UN referendum and hoped Senator Coburn's visit would help "warm up" U.S.-Taiwan relations. Echoing comments from Foreign Minister James Huang to Congressmen Solomon Ortiz (D-TX) and Steve Chabot (R-OH) earlier this week, VP Lu urged the U.S. to trust Taiwan to maintain peace in the region. She also raised Taipei's continuing concern over Beijing's planned flight route running just west of the mid-line in the Taiwan Strait, and appreciation for USG intervention with respect to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's "recent misinterpretation" of UN Resolution 2758 (as giving China sovereignty over Taiwan). She noted that the U.S. had supported Taiwan after China launched missiles following Taiwan's 1996 election. "Would the U.S. support Taiwan again?" she queried.

¶3. (C) Regarding the DPP's UN referendum, the Senator said he would personally support Taiwan being in the UN, but did not know why Taiwan would want to join such an "ineffective" and "wasteful" organization. Another option for Taiwan might be joining a "League of Democratic Nations," which China could not join. Otherwise, it would be difficult for Taiwan to circumvent China's UN veto. Meanwhile, the Senator said, he wanted to make sure Taiwan's defense needs are addressed

in spite of what he called "miscommunications" between the U.S. and Taiwan. The Deputy Director added that the U.S. is also concerned about the Taiwan Strait flight-route issue and has been actively working on it with other countries.

COBURN MEETING WITH DEFENSE MINISTER

¶4. (C) Defense Minister Lee told Senator Coburn that his goal is to maintain a viable self-defense capability for Taiwan and to prevent war with China. The defense budget recently increased to 3% of GDP, the Defense Minister said, and requested the Senator's support for Taiwan's future defense procurements. Defense Minister Lee hopes the U.S. will assist Taiwan in not only the procurement of new hardware, but also with intelligence exchange and defense technology. The Legislative Yuan approved funding for the F-16C/D, the Defense Minister noted, but then froze it. As soon as the U.S. provides pricing data, the Minister said, the money will be made available.

¶5. (C) Senator Coburn asked about the mission readiness rate of Taiwan's current F-16s, to which the Defense Minister replied it is at 70% with USD 30 million allocated for spare parts in 2008. The Defense Minister, however, expects this rate to increase. Technical Section Chief Hu interjected that there are no issues related to U.S. support that might impact Taiwan's readiness rate.

¶6. (C) Finally, the Defense Minister talked about the threat of China's expanding military capability to the region and the U.S. Taipei has no intention of changing the status quo, he said, but the PRC--through activities such as its newly planned flight route in the Taiwan Strait--is changing the

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status quo. The Senator informed the Minister that the U.S. is well aware of the threat from China and assured him of his unwavering support for Taiwan.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Senator Coburn's visit to Taiwan, including a visit to view the Container Security Initiative (CSI) in Kaohsiung, received high-level attention because of his strong support for Taiwan. It has also been a year since a U.S. senator visited Taiwan. The Senator was frank in discussing his support of Taiwan's democracy and also mentioned how "offensive" he had found a call from the Chinese Embassy in Washington, before his visit, which had tried to discourage him from visiting his "friends" in Taiwan.

¶8. (C) Senator Coburn did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

YOUNG